

Ford to Appoint Citizens Panel To Probe CIA

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President Ford announced yesterday that he will use the time-honored device of a "blue-ribbon" commission to investigate the controversy over domestic spying by the Central Intelligence Agency.

The objective of the commission will be to determine whether the CIA "exceeded its statutory authority" in surveillance operations conducted within the United States.

President Ford decided that the panel was necessary, explained White House press secretary Ron Nessen, because "enough questions" pertaining to CIA activities within this country were raised in a report, as yet undisclosed, by the agency's director, William E. Colby.

The full membership of the presidential panel will be announced soon, according to the White House. It will be balanced with private and governmental figures.

Kissinger, however, said in response to a question that "I see no reason" to replace Helms as ambassador to Iran because of the domestic surveillance allegations.

The President announced that the Justice Department is looking "into such aspects of the matter as are within jurisdiction."

Helms, in sworn statements to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has denied that the CIA was involved in domestic surveillance and counterintelligence activities during the Nixon administration. It was during the early years of the Nixon presidency that the monitoring of American citizens by the CIA is alleged to have reached its peak.

In June, 1970, Helms took part in interdepartmental meetings of intelligence agencies at the White House, according to the published memoranda of former Nixon Administration adviser Tom Charles Huston. Helms had told the Foreign Relations Committee in February, 1973 that he knew of no such meetings.

Yesterday's announcement came after a day of high-level review by the President and Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger of the controversy over CIA domestic surveillance which surfaced in the press two weeks ago.

Former CIA Director Richard M. Helms, who has returned from his post as ambassador to Iran for a round of White House and congressional reviews, also participated in the discussions. Helms had break-



RICHARD M. HELMS

... central figure

fast with Kissinger and also spoke to the President for 25 minutes, Nessen noted, at his own request.

Helms will figure centrally in the various inquiries into questionable domestic activities by the CIA. Many of the allegations of improper surveillance—such as burglaries, electronic surveillance and postal snooping—stem from the 1965-1973 period when Helms was head of the agency.

A similar commission was created in 1967 in the aftermath of disclosures that the CIA had infiltrated U.S. labor, student, cultural and philanthropic groups and institutions to support covert operations abroad. The earlier commission was headed by former Attorney General Nicholas deB. Katzenbach, who last year called for an end to CIA covert political action programs.

It was not immediately clear whether the Colby report on domestic surveillance

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activities will be made public. There were indications from some informed government officials that the President felt the document was insufficient to clear the air of the present controversy.

"My feeling is that the President considered the tone of it too self-justifying," said one official. The Colby report was described as containing a short textual segment and a long series of appendices listing various types of domestic surveillance activities.

"It was not fit for human consumption," said another source.

Administration sources said President

Ford was sensitive to the fact that Helms and his agency were under heavy pressure during the Vietnam turmoil to determine whether antiwar demonstrations were provoked by foreign powers, or financed by them.

However, even allowing for this pressure, Mr. Ford's deputies said he felt Helms had made at least a liberal interpretation of his duties as CIA director.

The President is looking to the citizens committee, sources said, to take a fresh reading on how Helms' actions compared to his statutory authority. The panel will include at least one former governor and a former Cabinet officer with both domestic and foreign service.